

Message Text

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42

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 SY-05 SCCT-01 EB-07 DOTE-00

FAA-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SCA-01 OMB-01

USSS-00 IO-11 A-01 AID-05 PC-01 OPR-02 SCS-03 DHA-02

CAB-02 WRD-01 SAM-01 CCO-00 /113 W

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R 091502Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6233

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ASEC, PINS, EAIR, IT

SUBJECT: ARREST OF ARMED LIBYANS AT ROME/FIUMICINO AIRPORT

1. ROME NEWSPAPERS CARRIED ARTICLES OVER WEEKEND ON APPREHENSION OF THREE ARMED ARABS TRANSITTING FIUMICINO AIRPORT ON SATURDAY, MARCH 6. THESE REPORTS IDENTIFIED THE THREE AS SAAD ABDUSALAM MOHAMED, ABDEL GASSEM ELSUOUSI, AND AHMED IBRAHIM MOHD. ALL WERE AGE 24, AND CARRIED LIBYAN PASSPORTS; MOHAMED'S WAS A LIBYAN DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT. AS DETAILED IN THE PRESS, THE THREE HAD DISEMBARKED FROM AN ALITALIA CAIRO TO ROME FLIGHT AND IN PASSING THROUGH SECURITY CONTROLS, ONE TRIPPED A METAL DETECTOR. AIRPORT POLICE RESPONDED TO THE ALARM AND CONFISCATED MOHAMED'S BRIEFCASE, WHICH WAS THEN PASSED THROUGH A FLUOROSCOPE DETECTOR AND DISCOVERED TO CONTAIN THREE PISTOLS AND A HAND GRENADE.

2. THOUGH HE PROTESTED THAT HE WAS A DIPLOMAT, MOHAMED AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS WERE ARRESTED BY POLICE. PRESS REPORTS

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INDICATE THAT POLICE QUESTIONING REVEALED ALL WERE LIBYAN

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AND MOHAMED IS ALLEGEDLY AN OFFICER IN THEIR FOREIGN MINISTRY. THE LIBYAN CONSUL IN ROME ALLEGEDLY EXAMINED THE PASSPORTS AND CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD BEEN STOLEN.

3. THE PRESS FURTHER REPORTS THAT EGYPTIAN SOURCES CLAIM THAT THE THREE INTENDED TO KIDNAP ABDEL MOUHAIN AL HUNI, LIBYAN FOREIGN MINISTER NOW RESIDENT IN CAIRO. AL HUNI WAS TO FLY TO PARIS VIA ROME ON THE SAME ALITALIA FLIGHT, BUT APPARENTLY, BEING FOREWARNED OF THE ATTEMPT, CHANGED TO A TWO FLIGHT AT THE LAST MINUTE. THE THREE LIBYANS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE ATTEMPTED AN AIRCRAFT HIJACKING TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR MISSION, TAKING AL HUNI BACK TO TRIPOLI.

4. MARCH 9 RADIO NEWS REPORTS STATED THAT TICKETS FOR THE THREE LIBYANS HAD BEEN PURCHASED BY THE LIBYAN EMBASSY IN CAIRO.

5. COMMENTS: EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS FROM LOCAL TWA SECURITY REPRESENTATIVE THAT, BECAUSE OF LAX SECURITY PRECAUTIONS AT CAIRO AIRPORT, TWA LAST WEEK UNDERTOOK ITS OWN PRE-BOARDING SCREENING PROCEDURES THERE. THIS MAY ACCOUNT FOR FACT THAT THE THREE LIBYANS DID NOT BOARD TWA FLIGHT WITH AL HUNI, AND THEREBY POSSIBLY AVOIDED A HIJACK OF AN AMERICAN CARRIER. SECOND POINT IS THAT THIS INCIDENT DRAMATICALLY ILLUSTRATES DEGREE TO WHICH ROME AIRPORT AUTHORITIES HAVE TIGHTENED LOCAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS SINCE DECEMBER 1973 TERRORIST ATTACK ON A PAA 707 AT FIUMICINO AIRPORT. VOLPE

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